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William J. Clinton

The White House,
March 18, 1999.

Remarks on Receiving the Peace Garden Scroll and the Shalom Chaver Award for International Leadership

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Leah and Dahlia; Noa, Yuval, Tali, Rachel: Hillary and I are honored to welcome you here. We are honored by the Shalom Chaver Award and the Peace Garden and the power of your example.

Thank you, Noa, for the beautiful song. I thank the members of the Cabinet who are here, the administration, especially Secretary Albright and Mr. Berger, and I want to say a special word of thanks to all those who have been on our peace team, now and for the last 6 years: Mr. Ross, Mr. Indyk; before them, Secretary Christopher, Mr. Lake and others.

I welcome the members of the diplomatic corps who are here. I think it would be worth noting, as a particular tribute to Prime Minister Rabin that the members of the diplomatic corps who are here are the Ambassadors of Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Qatar, Oman, and the PLO. Welcome.

I thank Congressmen Lantos, Lewis, and Lowey for being here. We have many distinguished guests from Israel, including General and Mrs. Mordechai and Mrs. Barak. We thank you for being here, all of our guests from Israel, and all of our American guests. Thank you for coming, in the words of Prime Minister Rabin, to make a stand against violence and for peace.

We are gratified to know that this Rabin Center will promote Yitzhak's legacy and his vision of a Middle East in a world where people do not have to die for peace but can actually live in peace and enjoy it.

I still remember quite clearly the meeting we had in March of 1993, when the Oslo agreement was still months away, but he had already foreseen the bold steps he would

have to take. He shared with me his assessment of the danger posed by the adversaries in the Middle East. As I recall, he called it a marriage of extremists and missiles. He understood that Israel needed a strategic peace, a circle of peace with others in the region to isolate and weaken extremists.

All I could say to him then, and all I can do now is to state again that, as Israel takes risks for peace, the United States will do everything in its power to minimize those risks and advance that cause.

Today I also thank Leah and Dahlia for remembering our friend His Majesty King Hussein. In a humorous moment in an otherwise profoundly somber day, at his funeral, I was standing with another leader of the Arab world whom I dare not mention for fear of embarrassing him, and we noticed, standing there at the King's funeral Prime Minister Netanyahu, General Barak and General Mordechai. And the leader looked at me and he said, "This is truly an amazing world. King Hussein is the only thing they agree on." [Laughter]

Hussein and Yitzhak Rabin were brave soldiers who had the courage to tell the hard truth that there would be no security for any in the Middle East without fairness for all, that the time had come to lift people's hopes, not exploit their fears, to reach across the divide of history and hatred, to fulfill the true promise of the Promised Land. They knew well enough that extremists would try to derail the peace accord by keeping fear and frustration, mistrust and misery dominant in the lives of ordinary Palestinians and Israelis. But they were determined to turn back the tide, and so they did.

How we gloried in those brilliant days in 1993 and 1995 when the leaders of the Middle East gathered here to grasp hands and pledged to build a safer and better future. How we enjoyed those first halting steps toward reconciliation. Even then there was humor. I will never forget when Yitzhak promised me in September of '93 that he would shake Mr. Arafat's hand as long as there was no kissing. [Laughter]

But it wasn't long after that when they came here to sign all the maps to embody in concrete terms the accord which had been reached, when a dispute arose. And it was

at the last minute, and no one knew how to resolve it. So I showed them back to my private dining room and I said, "I believe I could find Jericho, but otherwise I don't know much about this map. You guys go in that room and solve it. We'll wait until it's done." And they sat there alone and resolved the problem.

Today, the people of the Middle East still have a chance to build the secure peace of Prime Minister Rabin's dreams, to isolate the extremists, to weaken their ability to shatter the peace with terrorism or missiles or weapons of mass destruction. But it is just a chance.

I can still hear the strong voices of Yitzhak Rabin and King Hussein speaking to us today and saying: Push ahead with the peace process. Build on Oslo and Wye River—before it is too late. But today, their voices must be embodied by others all across the Middle East. *Tzarich chaverim li-shalom*. We need friends of peace.

The loss of Yitzhak Rabin, the premature death of His Majesty King Hussein make it time—and past time—for all in the Middle East to remember the wisdom of the ages: Life is fleeting. When we return to dust, our differences are as nothing. All that remains is our legacy. It must be an affirmation of our common humanity. Why is it we can only see the humanity we share when we lose someone we love?

Long ago, Leah said it very well in 1975 at a women's conference in Mexico City. She said this: "War solves nothing. Our area thirsts for peace, for the benefit of all peoples living there. Our true enemies are poverty, illiteracy, disease, and inequality of opportunity."

Leah, you and Yitzhak lived the history of Israel together, from your marriage in the year of your nation's birth, from the ashes of the Holocaust and the seeds of the diaspora. You fought for independence and survival. You helped to build the enlightened, vibrant democratic society that Israel is today. And I want to say that we are very grateful to you for your sacrifices, for your contributions to help build an Israel that is strong and free, prosperous and at peace. We thank you.

That is also America's cause in the Middle East; and in Central America, where I visited last week, and where longtime adversaries in civil wars now reach across great divides; and in Northern Ireland, the land of my ancestors, whose leaders I met with yesterday, where we are so close to finishing the job; and in the former Yugoslavia, where we are determined to avoid in Kosovo a repeat of the terrible senseless bloodshed of Bosnia; and in Africa, where too much blood still is being shed but whose leaders came here this week in a remarkable display of unity to seek a partnership of freedom and opportunity with the United States.

In all these places the struggle for peace continues, and we must continue it in the Middle East, between Israelis and Palestinians, and all across the region, because every day we delay the process of peace strengthens the extremists and supports their violent designs.

I would like to close with three admonitions. We must not grow weary. The psalmist says, "Do good; seek peace, and pursue it." We must not harden our hearts in the face of all that has been lost. Shakespeare said it best:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as a gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.

Let us give it and take it. And finally, we must not lose faith. Yitzhak Rabin once quoted these words from the poet Tchernichovsky: "I believe in the future. That day will come when peace and blessings are borne from nation to nation." And he added, "I want to believe that that day is not far off."

With the help of a merciful God, we will hasten the day of Yitzhak Rabin's dreams.

Shalom. Salaam. Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:49 p.m. in the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to the following members of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's family: Leah Rabin, widow, Dahlia Rabin-Pelossof, daughter, Noa Pelossof, granddaughter, Yuval Rabin, son, and his wife, Tali, and Rachel Jacob, sister. The President also referred to Gen. Yitzhak Mordechai, and his

wife, Cochi; Gen. Ehud Barak, chairman, Israeli Labor Party, and his wife, Nava; Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. The scroll and the award were presented by the Yitzhak Rabin Center.

Remarks to the Radio and TV Correspondents' Dinner

March 18, 1999

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Jim. I want to thank all the officers for making me feel so welcome. Evelyn, thank you for the great dinner conversation—Mr. Speaker, Members of Congress, my fellow Americans. I want to thank you for your invitation to come have dinner with 2,000 members of the Washington press corps. [Laughter] I accepted. If this isn't contrition, I don't know what is. [Laughter]

I know you can't really laugh about this. I mean, the events of the last year have been quite serious. If the Senate vote had gone the other way, I wouldn't be here tonight. I demand a recount. [Laughter]

Look, this is just the beginning of my week with the press. Tomorrow I've got a press conference and then the Gridiron dinner the day after that. You'd think I was selling a book. [Laughter] Now, I know it's been a long time since I had a press conference, but I remember it well. [Laughter] All those questions that day about the nomination of Zoe Baird. [Laughter]

Look, you can probably tell I'm a little nervous being around all these reporters tonight. So if you will forgive me, I'd like to employ a method that has worked pretty well for me over the last year.

[At this point, "Fuffles and Flurishes" was played and the Prime Minister of the United Republic of Carjackador, Joreb Onspot, was announced.]

The President. Your Excellency, welcome to the United States. [Laughter] The podium is yours. [Laughter]

[The Prime Minister spoke briefly in a foreign language.]

The President. Well your Excellency, without my headphones, I have no idea what you just said. [Laughter] But it sounded very much like words of praise. I want you to know that they mean more to me than I could possibly express. [Laughter]

[The Prime Minister replied briefly in a foreign language.]

The President. I agree with that, as well. [Laughter]

Now, your Excellency, this is just a dinner with the press. Tomorrow is the real press conference. I look forward to seeing you there. [Laughter]

Now, I know that the press corps has been busy preparing questions for me. So I've been working on the answers. Never mind the questions; here are the answers. [Laughter]

"Yes, Helen." "She was first, Sam. I'll get to you, Sam. Not yet, though." "The longest peacetime expansion in history." "No, I didn't watch it." [Laughter] "No, I haven't read it." [Laughter] "Yes, Wolf, I am doing this press conference because Joe made me do it."

Your Excellency, why don't you just have a seat right here, just listen to the translation, and I'll ask you to join me again if I need some cover. [Laughter]

Now, I know there's been a lot of interest in the future political career of the First Lady. I honestly don't know what she'll decide, but I can tell you this. Yesterday at breakfast, she was complaining that it is impossible to get a decent bagel in Washington. [Laughter] By the way, I'm from Arkansas. You know, what is a schmeer? [Laughter]

The Prime Minister. [Unintelligible]—Philadelphia Cream Cheese.

The President. Cream cheese. Thank you very much. I got it.

And you know, the Vice President's been busy, too. When I was in Central America, I turned on my trusty C-SPAN, and I saw the Vice President talking about how rough it is to travel on airplanes these days, the delays, the lost baggage, the disgusting meals. [Laughter] Al, I didn't know it was that bad on Air Force II. [Laughter] I think he's due for an upgrade.